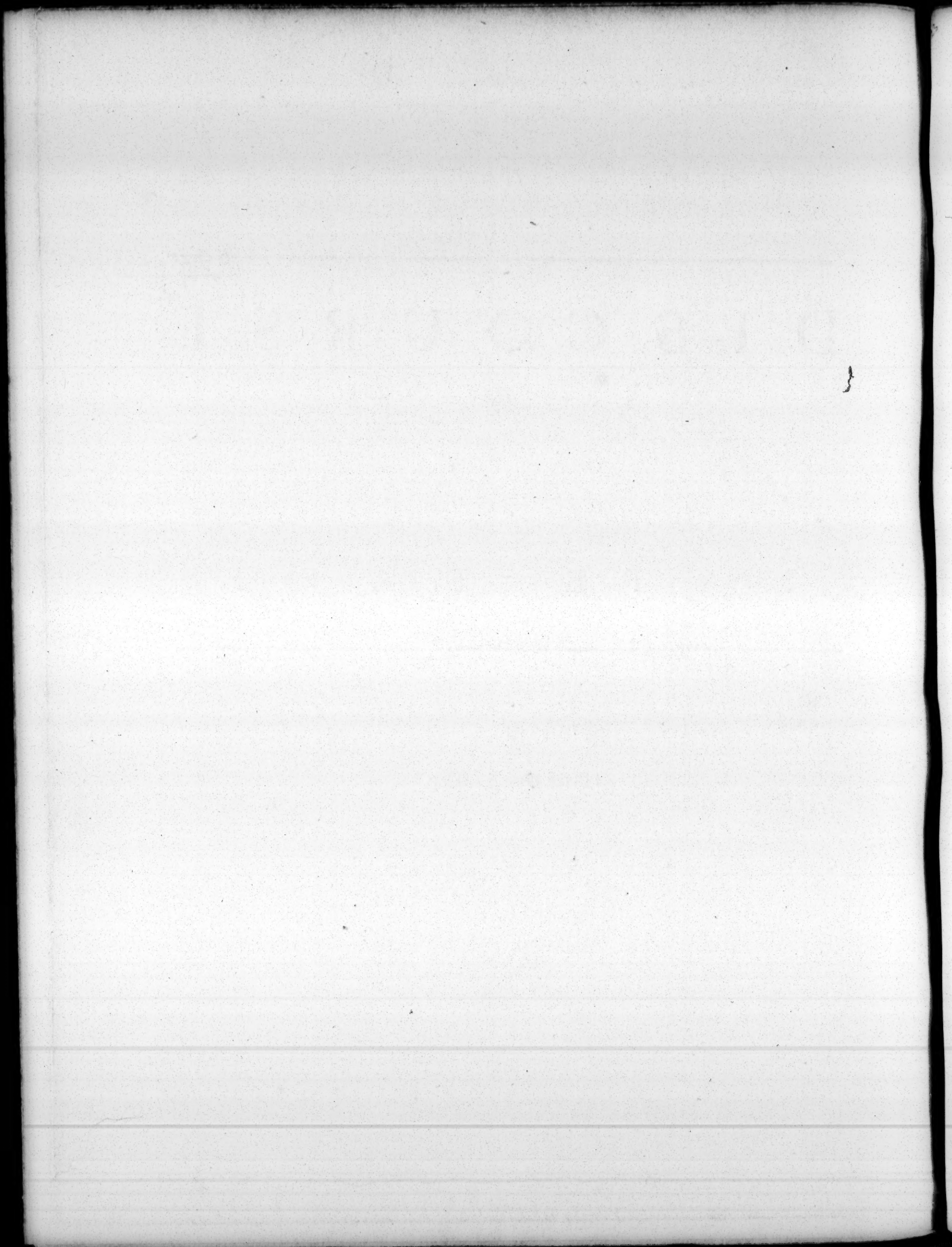

D I S C O U R S E

O N T H E

L A T E F A S T.

[Price One Shilling.]



14
A

DISCOURSE

ON THE

LATE FAST.

By PHILELEUTHERUS NORFOLCIENSIS, *D^r Parr.*

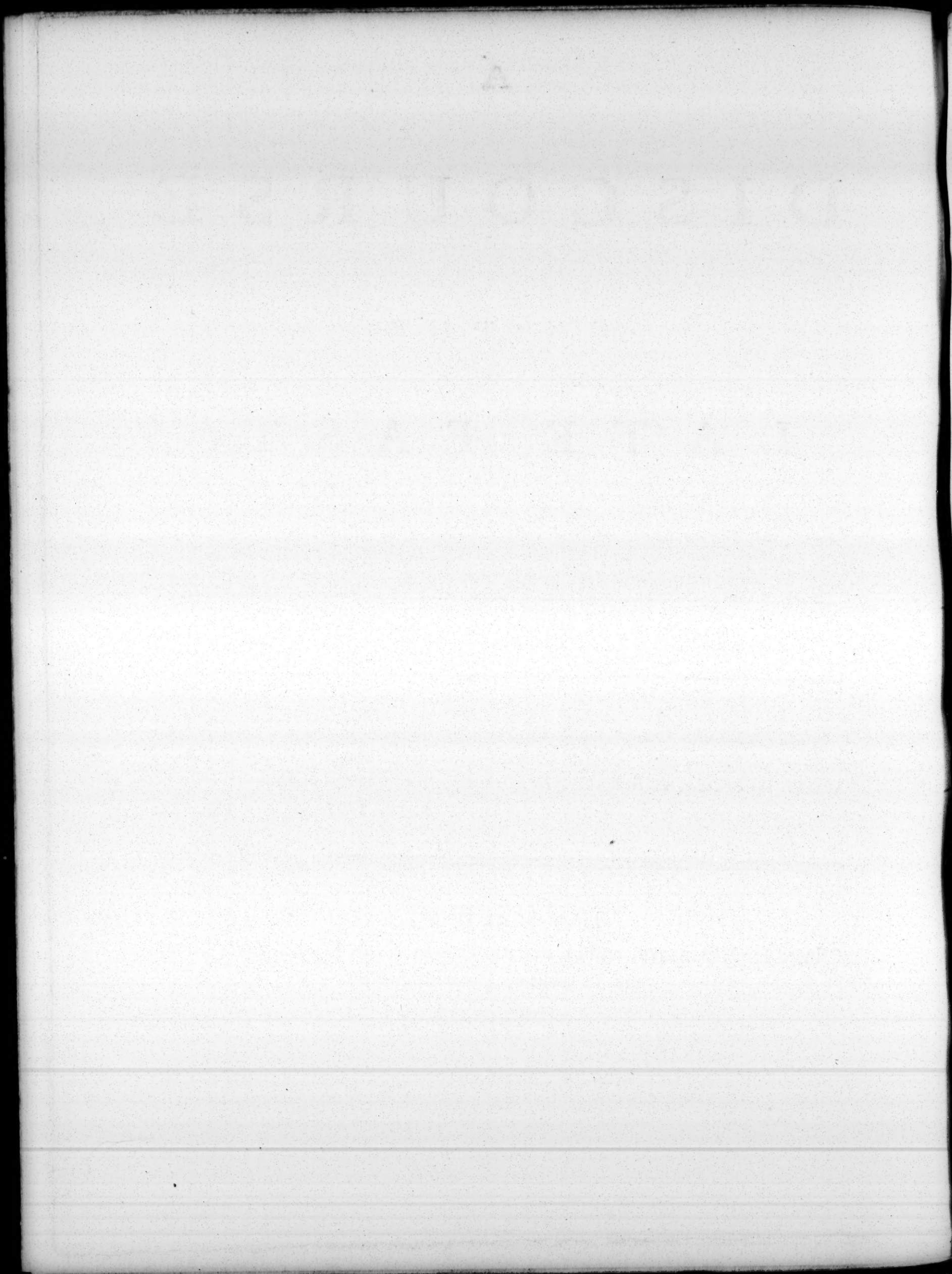
Ἡ ἰκτὶνο ἡμῶν θαυμασίον μᾶλλον, ὥς ἰσχυρόν τι πόλις ἐστὶ φύσει; πάσχειν γὰρ δὴ τοιαῦτα αἱ πόλεις οὐν χρόνον ἑπέραντον, ὅμως ἐνταῖς τινος αὐτῶν μόνιμοί τι εἰσὶ καὶ οὐκ ἀνατρέπομαι. Πολλὰ μὲν ἐνίοτε, καθάπερ πλοῖα καὶ ἀδύμενα διόλυνται, καὶ διολύσασι, καὶ ἔτι διολοῦνται, διὰ τῆς τῶν κυβερνητῶν καὶ ΝΑΥΤΩΝ μοχθηρίαν.

See Plat. Politic. pag. 557. Edit. Ficin.

L O N D O N :

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M, DCC, LXXXI.



P R E F A C E.

THE Author of the following Discourse, is a serious, and, he hopes, an unprejudiced Clergyman of the Church of England. He conceals his name, because he is not impelled by any motives of vanity to venture on publication; and he has published, because the sentiments which he maintains, seem to coincide with the most useful purposes, which the late Fast could be intended to promote. Those sentiments, indeed, are not likely to attract popularity, by slavish adulation, or seditious invective: they flatter the *prejudices* of *no* party, and are honestly intended to reform such *immoralities* as may justly be imputed to *all*.

His ego gratiora dictū alia esse scio: sed me vera pro gratis loqui, etsi meum ingenium non moneret, necessitas cogit. Vellem equidem vobis placere, Quirites: sed multo malo vos salvos esse, qualicunque erga me animo futuri estis.

Orat. T. Q. Capitolini, Liv. lib. tert. ab urbe conditâ.

ERRATA & CORRIGENDA.

- P. 1. line 1. after *this* dele semi-colon, add a colon.
- P. 7. line 10. *they* should have been printed in Roman letter.
- P. 19. line 38. *dele* the note of admiration, and add a colon.
- P. 26. in the *Note*, for Eteacclus, *read* Eteocclus.
- P. 28. line 37. at *afflicted*, read a comma instead of a semi-colon.

LUKE XIII. Ver. 2. and 3.

Suppose ye, that these Galileans were sinners, above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you nay; but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

THE occasion, on which these words were spoken, is this:—* Judas Gaulonites, a man of a most boisterous and intrepid temper, had raised a sedition in Galilee, under the pretence of rescuing his countrymen from the ignominious pressure of the Roman yoke. Unfortunately Fanaticism was at hand, to supply fuel to those flames which Faction had kindled. Hence the followers of Judas, in that blindness of understanding, and that frenzy of passion, into which they had been seduced by their leader, resolved to pay no tribute, but in the Temple; to acknowledge no king, but Jehovah. After this overt-act of avowed opposition to the Romans, and of personal indignity against Cæsar himself, they appeared at the public sacrifices, intending, no doubt, by the vehemence of their clamours, and the notoriety of their example, to spread wide a spirit of insurrection among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Their design was, however, crushed by the activity of Pilate; and it is remarkable that their offence was punished, on the same spot where it was committed.—In the Temple they had determined to refuse the tribute which Cæsar claimed:—in the Temple they were cut off by Cæsar's Representative.

Some Jews, it seems, had taken occasion to mention the fate of these unhappy men to Jesus; and from the sharpness of his reply we may infer the malignity of their motives.——Forgetful of their own sins, and altogether unalarmed at the punishment that awaited them, they looked back with savage triumph to the miseries of the deluded Galileans. For this reason our blessed Lord at once mortified their vanity, and roused them from their insensibility.

B

Suppose

* Vid. Josephus Antiq. lib. xviii. cap. 1. Edit. Genev. 1535.

Suppose ye, said he, that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. — Doubtless the Galileans had been sinners — their calamities, too, were justly and evidently the effects of their *sins*. But from these sins, however atrocious, from those calamities, however severe, no conclusion could be drawn either for the comparative *innocence* or *security* of their countrymen — None for their innocence, because the accused who “suffered such things, were not sinners above all other Galileans” — none for their security, because the accusers themselves, unless they repented, were likewise doomed “to perish.”

In the words of my text you may observe a kind of indirect censure, which you will readily allow to have been, on the part of Christ, most deservedly applied, and most graciously intended — But through the secret magic force of self-delusion, that censure was soon forgotten by those to whom our Lord addressed himself; and in process of time, the sentence accompanying it was executed with a most astonishing exactness. — It was executed by the very conquerors who had slain the Galileans; in consequence of the very crimes for which the Galileans perished; and on the persons, or, at least, on the immediate descendants of those very men, who had “told Christ of the Galileans,” in order to sport with their misfortunes, and to blacken their guilt.

These things are written for our admonition. — Whether we examine the private or the public conduct of mankind, we may observe that the temptations of pleasure, and wealth, and power, are hostile even to their temporal felicity. — Inattentive to the hand that protects, and the eye that watches over them, intoxicated with success, and pampered with indulgence, nations as well as individuals often abandon themselves to the wildest desires of the human heart. With an involuntary, or perhaps an *acquired* indifference to their own situation, with the *pride*, though not the *malevolence* of Jews, they recount the faults, and vindicate the sufferings of other states; and, at last, in the midst of all their *gay amusements*, and all their *towering projects*, are themselves overtaken by destruction as by a whirlwind. This conduct, strange as it may appear in beings who are endowed with faculties to recall the past, and to explore the future, must not always be imputed to hypocrisy, or deliberate uncharitableness. — Where no restraints of false shame can be supposed to operate, and the actions of men are sheltered from impertinent and unfriendly inspection, few have the courage to descend into the depths of their own bosoms, to search out every latent corruption, and to provide against every distant evil, to which they are peculiarly exposed. — Much less, then, should we wonder at their lethargy, amidst the common danger, where each man shifts off from himself what *equally concerns* his neighbour, and what his neighbour *equally neglects*; where all confide in *others* for expedients which
none

none have the resolution to employ; where every doubt is misconstrued into singularity, and every fear ascribed to cowardice; where the blind lead the blind, and the audacious harden the audacious: where indolence makes the best of men unwilling to anticipate, what, as despair tells them, cannot be prevented; and the worst, quite plunged in the enjoyments of to-day, set at defiance every mischief which to-morrow may produce.

One difference there is indeed in the dispensations of Providence, as they eventually affect men in their collective and separate capacities; and *that* one, it is most necessary for me to point out, and for you to remember — I mean, that whatever inequality of distribution may be observed among particular men, the rewards and punishments of nations are uniformly and visibly accomplished in this life. The honest endeavours of individuals are often disappointed; their upright actions are misrepresented; nor do they, in the *sight of the world*, receive any recompence, however their minds may be fortified against unmerited distress, by the hopes of future retribution — But in the affairs of nations, the proofs of a Providence are not left to be collected by the slow deductions of analogy: — they are written in the clear and broad characters of experience; and it is scarcely possible to mention any one uncorrupted people, who have been totally destroyed — An enemy may have disturbed their repose, or an oppressor may have invaded their rights: but virtue has ever produced such harmony of opinion, and such concentration of strength, among those who happily formed at once the *best* and the *greatest* part of the citizens: it has inspired them with such wisdom in the council, and such vigour in the field: it has furnished so many resources both to repair miscarriage, and to improve success, that they have at last risen superior to the machinations of internal perfidy, and to the assaults of outward force. — In private life, we see men of the most licentious morals, whose judgement is reserved by almighty God to the last day, and the lustre of whose happiness, unclouded by the intervention of adversity, sets only in the grave. — But there is upon record no one instance of a whole people, whom God, after delivering them over to an infatuated and reprobate mind, has not finally visited with the scourge of his displeasure.

The fact is incontestible, and the reason is obvious: for while the general tendency of sin to produce misery, is ascertained by experience, and while moral evil, when closely analysed, is known to resolve itself into natural, it is not inconsistent with the honour of God to continue even his abused mercies to particular persons; to grant a partial impunity to transgressors, where the instantaneous exercise of justice might *immediately* and almost *exclusively* involve in the punishment those who did not share in the guilt; to leave men in the possession of external advantages, while their minds, perhaps, are inwardly racked with the most poignant anguish.

On

On the other hand, states *can* suffer only in the *aggregate* character in which they offend. Religion tells you, that their sufferings *ought* to be inflicted, since it were fruitless to suspend the rigours of justice among those, whom mercy, instead of leading them to reformation, would plunge more deeply in guilt. From reason you may learn, that their sufferings *must* be inflicted, because the succours, which, among *individuals*, are supplied by the righteous to the wicked, and by the prosperous to the happy, can have no place among a people who are corrupt *without exception*, and therefore are, without even a partial exemption, exposed to the consequences of that corruption.

As the popular representation of the *punishments* assigned to states has been extravagantly misunderstood by some, and unjustly ridiculed by others, it may not be improper to state clearly and concisely, what is meant by the expression. States are composed of individuals; and when I say, that the former can be only, in their *collective* capacity, punished in this world, it does not follow, that the latter are not exposed to *further* punishment for the very same actions in a future world. *Nations* suffer in the subversion of their government, or in the loss of their rights and privileges, or in the defeat of their armies, or in the diminution of their treasures. These public evils are often the effects of public vices, and are *then* called *punishments* — those punishments affect the aggregate of persons who constitute a *state*; and that state, including a community of interests and relations, which do not extend beyond the grave, is *properly* said to be capable only of such evils or punishments as can be inflicted in the present life, by the destruction of those particular interests, and the dissolution of those particular relations. — When, therefore, the whole of a people are criminal, no part can have a right to be safe — where the majority are habitually and desperately wicked, the natural consequences that attend the vices of the many, cannot be prevented by the virtues of the few; and hence it is, that flagrant and national depravity always demands, and always incurs, exemplary and national *visitation*.

Upon subjects of general utility, it is most becoming, and most safe, to speak a language that is in general use; for in the pursuit of *uncommon* and *unnecessary* precision, we often excite doubts, where we mean only to prevent mistakes, and extinguish the ardour of piety by the very arguments which are employed to disperse the gloom of superstition. Philosophy, it is true, has introduced many subtle distinctions between the ordinary and extraordinary providence of God, and between his general and particular dispensations. But these distinctions have, perhaps, no *absolute* existence in the nature of things: they are only relative to our imperfect modes of conception; and serve as resting-places to finite reason when fatigued and confounded in contemplating the works of an infinite Creator. For this reason, I shall not enter into profound and intricate controversies, where, among the peremptory and discordant declarations of the disputants, the difference of their opinions is rather verbal than real; and where,
upon

upon every hypothesis which does not *professedly deny all* divine agency, we are authorized to say that vice brings on misery. While this is the case, the temporal calamities incident to wicked men are *equally* to be dreaded, and the moral dispensations of their Maker are equally to be approved, whether the sinner becomes wretched by the operation of ordinary or extraordinary laws, by physical necessity, or by judicial interposition. The designs of God are perfectly consistent with each other, however we may be pleased to distinguish them by forensic or philosophical appellations. Though *Judgments*, in the common acceptation of the word, be totally excluded, the vicious man can derive no advantage from the exclusion, because he *yet* stands exposed to the sad consequences of his vice, in a regular and established series of natural causes.

Under the government of that Being, by whom those causes are appointed and controuled, seeming contingencies are the result of real and unalterable design. — Events, whether near or remote, whether trifling or important in our uncertain estimation, whether beneficial or fatal to our worldly interests, whether they affect families or kingdoms, whether they depress the most exalted, or elevate the most obscure characters, are, each of them, subject to the direction of unerring wisdom, and each of them conducive to the accomplishment of that extensive plan, the instruments of which are all the actions of all the creatures whom God has formed, and the end of which is their supreme and universal good. We may further observe, that while the projects of the wise, and the actions of the virtuous, more visibly coincide with the purposes of the Almighty, those purposes are virtually promoted by the very causes which may *seem* to obstruct them, by the stratagems of the cunning, by the oppressions of the cruel, and by the usurpations of the ambitious.

Whatever scenes, therefore, of confusion may present themselves to our views, which are dim, *only*, because they are confined, the Deity does not sit an inactive unconcerned spectator of what is passing in the world. — When nation rises up against nation, when thousands perish in the havock of battle, and ten thousands are weeping in secret amidst the loss of their friends, and the plunder of their property, it were the excess of impiety to imagine, that he who keepeth Israel, slumbereth or sleepeth. — Though on some occasions we discover nothing beyond permission or connivance on the part of God, he, on those *very occasions*, performs some acts of direct and positive appointment. Even where he seems carelessly to have thrown the reins on the neck of human passion; where ignorant men suppose the rigour of his government to be relaxed, and wicked men make their boast that his “arm is shortened;” from afar he discerns the precise point at which it is most fitting to curb the impetuosity of his creatures, and to say, “hitherto shall ye come.” In truth, the most secret counsels of man are not screened from Him, who by “understanding stretched out the heavens:” nor do the most intricate or unwieldy machines of government create any embar-
C
rassment

raffment to that power, before which "the nations are counted as the small dust in the balance." *

Enough has been advanced, I hope, to convince you, that the same providence which presides over the interests of individuals, determines also the fate of nations : and if this fact be established, it follows that the moral government of God is never at variance with the natural, and that the stability of public happiness must depend on the integrity of public manners. Such, therefore, is the wise constitution of things, that virtue becomes to every people the most effectual preservative, not only against inward decay, but external violence. Vice, on the other hand, insensibly, but surely, leads to danger.

That a corrupted state contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction, and that, cherished as it may be by some transient gleam of prosperity, it cannot sustain the rude blasts of adverse fortune, are positions not less supported by the reasonings of philosophers, than by the evidence of historians. The same causes, it is well known by the speculatist, must ever produce the same effects, whether the subjects on which they operate, be many or few : and with respect to the *number* of those who are holden together by the bonds of wickedness, and would "strengthen themselves in their ungodliness," *that* number, instead of *arresting* the uplifted stroke, serves only, at once, to *accelerate* it, by multiplying offenders, through the hopes of impunity, and to *aggravate* it by increasing the enormity of their offences. Ten righteous men may, in some extraordinary case, extend the reward of their personal merit to a whole city ; but the combined efforts of ten thousand unrighteous men are of no avail against that Being, who may indeed be propitiated while his presence is acknowledged "in the still small voice ;" but who cannot be opposed, when "the windows from on high are opened, and the foundations of the earth do shake." You well remember the conditions on which Sodom *might* have been *spared* ; and can you then forget the reasons for which Nineveh, after the successful interposition of one prophet, and the neglected warnings of another, was at last *overthrown* ?

Most consistent and most interesting is the lesson, which sacred and profane history alike inculcates, in opposition to those who would resolve all events into human agency, independent of the divine, and who suppose the pursuits and the fortunes of men to be determined by the impulse of blind chance, or the decrees of irresistible fatality. — After the measure of their guilt was filled up, the Canaanites were vanquished and exterminated. The Jews took possession of their land ; and when they had, in their turn, apostatised from the God who first established, and then protected them, they were dragged into captivity. Immersed in voluptuousness, and enervated by sloth, the Persians sunk under the

the shock, when attacked by the brave and uncorrupted Greeks — But soon was the courage of the victors enfeebled by the luxury of those whom they had subdued; and they fell an easy, I must add, an inglorious prey, to the hardy veterans of Rome. — Afterwards, the Romans themselves were destroyed, when the generous sentiments, the manly pursuits, and the austere manners of their ancestors had fallen into disuse, and even into contempt: when a spirit of ambition had inflamed the higher ranks, when a spirit of insurrection had divided the lower ranks, and a spirit of effeminacy and debauchery had poisoned *all* ranks indiscriminately. Their destruction, too, was accomplished by a rabble of barbarians, whom *they* defied without the power of resisting them; but whom, in the times of ancient valour, they *might* have defied without the imputation of rashness, and, in the times of ancient discipline, they would have resisted without difficulty. — Had no swarms of Goths and Vandals rushed down upon the Romans; had the “blast of the terrible ones not been as the storm against the wall;” their ruin might have been delayed, but not averted. — The mutinous spirit of the provinces, the brutal depravity of the citizens, and the outrageous licentiousness of the soldiers, would soon have produced the same effects, with circumstances equally tremendous. Unquestionably the vices of the conquered have even proved more pernicious than the arms of the conquerors; and it may be laid down as an invariable maxim, that no empire, however fruitful in resources, extensive in dominion, or conspicuous in fame, can long subsist, after it hath ceased to be virtuous. — Ostentatious magnificence, and the appearance even of formidable strength, it may still preserve; — but on the first breakings of those tempests which hang over all the aims of thoughtless and aspiring men, its *unsuspected* weakness will be inevitably exposed in its *unforeseen* perdition.

Curious it is to observe the rapid strides, with which the most celebrated states have descended from the airy and slippery eminences of greatness, to misery and to shame. When the sword has been sheathed, and every alarm far removed by the successes of war, ingenuity and diligence are usually employed in improving those inventions, to which men have been led by accident, or incited by necessity. — Refinement succeeds to improvement, and is itself followed close by corruption. Artificial wants then multiply beyond the power of supplying them; the dominion of appetite is extended farther and farther, till the objects of gratification, with whatever diversity they have been combined, and to whatever perfection they may have been wrought up, are almost exhausted. — The lust of pleasures gives new force to the lust of wealth, because wealth only can furnish the materials of enjoyment. — To the depravity of private morals succeeds the extinction of public spirit, and all become ripe for revolt, because all are eager for plunder. Complaints are then reciprocally urged and retorted, by those who *cannot* govern, and those who *will* not obey. Laws enacted to prevent evasion and violation, are, themselves, evaded by new artifices, and violated with greater audacity. Secret cabals are formed; open tumults break out; till some daring usurper rivets, in one lucky moment, the fetters of despotism
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on a lawless, helpless multitude ; or some foreign enemy, invited by the facility of conquest, bends down their necks to the galling yoke of servitude.

In this dismal catalogue of national evils, it well becomes us to remark some circumstances which constitute, I think, the heaviest part of human distress ; which carry with them the sharpest mortification to our vanity, and at the same time suggest to our humbled reason, the most salutary cautions. — In certain stages of excellence, and in certain favourable situations, the arts are known to strengthen the intellectual powers of men, and to enlarge the sphere of their operation. But the same arts, when they have degenerated into a vicious affectation, and are, to an excessive degree, intermixed with extraneous causes, debilitate the understanding, and deprave the heart. Instead of furnishing the conveniences, they multiply, without bounds, the superfluities of life ; and lead on in their train, not only that false taste which prefers the specious to the solid, but those feverish and insatiable appetites which every principle of reason, and every restraint of law, will be at last insufficient to controul. The arts are indeed auxiliary to commerce ; and commerce, in the exaggerated language of its panegyrists, is said to swell the tide of national wealth, to fasten the bonds of national union, to animate the measures of a people with new vigour, and to throw new splendour around their name. These advantages, I confess, *are* derived from commerce ; but they are derived *conditionally*, and *with restrictions* — they continue *so* long only, as the encroachments of monopoly are severely checked, and the price of commodities is regulated upon wise and enlarged principles ; so long as the middle ranks of men are content to receive protection, while they enjoy the fruits of industry, without panting for the distinctions which cherish laziness ; so long as innovation either in manners or laws is strictly watched, and every change in the employments or the amusements of private life is made subservient, not to the *vanity or the avarice of individuals*, but to the *public good*. But commerce, while it brings in opulence and power, does not always bring with them their correctives ; and, *without correctives*, they have ever been observed to corrupt. When therefore the torrent of corruption once breaks in upon the manners of a people, it rushes forward with increasing rapidity : it soon bears down all the barriers which private example, or public authority can oppose ; and at last plunges every great and every good quality in one undistinguished deluge of iniquity.

I have said that the vices of nations are generally to be ascribed to their luxury, and that luxury always terminated in their ruin. — But the assertion is contested. We are told that national corruption and luxury are terms of *vague* import ; that men of churlish tempers and contracted views are more ready to misapply than to explain those terms ; that public evils bring along with them their own remedy by an eventual, though an indirect increase of public happiness ; and that even the vices of individuals contribute to the advantage of the community.

community. Thus the excesses of the voluptuary, like the austerities of the recluse, triumph in the suffrage of perverted reason; and it is not easy to check every emotion of contempt, when the advocates for sensuality commend each other for the liberality of their sentiments, and the depth of their penetration.

Of these speculatists, who make every system of morals to be dependent on that of politics, and who sacrifice principles, hitherto esteemed invariable, to those which ever have been, and ever must be, fluctuating and problematical, some are actuated by the pride of singularity; others, by the hopes of escaping from their own secret apprehensions, when they have inspired their fellow-citizens with a kind of *contagious confidence*; and more, I am afraid, by the detestable expectation of pushing their own interests most effectually, amidst the supineness and false security, which their artifices have produced. But, whatever be their motives, which charity itself would be staggered to pronounce honourable, their arguments are professedly rested on the usefulness of luxury; and from its *usefulness*, the transition, in shallow and precipitate judgments, is not difficult, to its *innocence*, and even meritoriousness. This question therefore deserves to be seriously and fully examined, where the causes of national depravity are the topics of investigation; for, if any people should be persuaded that they are less *sinful* than other nations have been, they will instantly suppose themselves in less danger of *suffering* what other nations have suffered.

A state may be rich and powerful -- but the causes of political, as well as physical good, have their *limitations*. As excessive heat is found to consume, instead of cherishing, and excessive light dazzles rather than directs, so *excessive* power and riches have always proved fatal to those interests, which a *moderate* share of each has been known to promote. Let me not be misunderstood. — To condemn the acquisition of money indiscriminately, were more becoming the romantic speculatist, than the impartial reasoner. — In the improved state of society, wealth becomes in some degree necessary to the energy of military operations, to the dignity of civil government, and even to the comforts of domestic life. — It stimulates invention, and invigorates labour: it encourages population, by conferring upon every man what he may enjoy without interruption, and impart without diminution; and it preserves liberty, by making him both *anxious and able* to secure what he has obtained. But when the chasm that subsists between the higher and the inferior orders of men, is not filled up, or the distinctions that ought to separate them, are effaced by uniformity of wickedness; when the inundation of riches produces *artificial* poverty, which, co-operating with pride, always terminates in a poverty that is *real*; when the neglect of frugality exposes even the laborious to all those miseries which the lazy justly suffer without an effort to alleviate them, the state is equally endangered by private opulence and public want. On the one hand, wealth acquires an undue importance, from the extravagant value that opinion stamps upon it;

and the possessors, finding their influence to increase with their ambition, are soon encouraged to *oppress* those whom they have successfully attempted to *corrupt*, and to *impoverish* by corruption. On the other hand, the multitude by degrees sink down into the same meanness of disposition, and the same grossness of sentiment, that once induced the Cappadocians to continue in vassalage from habit, and from choice. Harassed by desires they know not how to gratify, they soon become indifferent to rights, of which the *existence* is almost forgotten with the *use*; they gladly resign a *precarious freedom* for the sake of an indolent and mercenary servitude; and when the perversion of their rights is adduced to justify the cruelties of usurpation, however we may detest the insolence of the oppressor, who makes the plea, we can scarcely commiserate the sufferings of the wretches, against whom it is urged.

In civil, as well as religious concerns, the imaginations of men are often amused, and their reason beguiled by groundless distinctions. They suffer themselves to be comforted under *known* evils by plausible and confident harangues upon the efficacy of *unknown resources*; and are persuaded, that one State may be on the whole benefited, by the very practices by which another State has been entirely subverted. Hence the most elaborate defences have been produced in favour of *relative* luxury, and nations have been reconciled to their crimes, or rather flattered into a conviction that they have the efficacy of virtue.

It is not merely to the love of paradox, that such defences owe their currency. — Few men have the prudence to distrust, and yet fewer have the intrepidity to examine, the soundness of those opinions which strike in with their own inclinations and habits. While they intend only to indulge their own sensual appetites, they can, upon reflection, justify the indulgence, by saying that the purest streams issue from an impure source: that the luxury charged upon themselves is rather nominal than real: that it circulates wealth, encourages assiduity, and causes the wants of the poor to be supplied by the superfluity of the opulent.

True it is, that God often extracts good from ill, and converts even the irregularity of his creatures to the honour of his government. But evils, *so far* as they *are* evils, ought to be lamented; and they, also, ought to be *redressed*, where the good resulting from them is apparently disproportionate to the aggregate of such disadvantages as are confessedly present, and of such as are probably future.

Even in monarchical states, where vanity lavishes what generosity would not confer, and where the distance that exists between the various ranks of society, somewhat slackens the progress of vicious emulation, it is not always safe to apply the

the distinctions which some men would support in favour of relative luxury. But, in a *mixed* state like our own, where the lower orders of men are less compelled to be dependent on their superiors, and are more able to imitate them; where the immediate advantages arising from luxury are often confined, and the consequential mischiefs are most rapid and most pernicious, those distinctions are, in many respects, impertinent. It is not by the sudden and irresistible will of a superior, but by the steady direction of laws, by the salutary discipline of manners, and by an habitual liberality of sentiment, that a free people can preserve their happiness or their virtue. Among such a people, if venality prevail in the lower classes of men, as well as the higher, it must be imputed to some imperfection in their *morals* as well as their *policy*.^{*} It generally arises from the excessive refinements of luxury, when all become eager to enjoy what ought to be confined to a few, and when the indigent are content to earn by *prostitution* some share of those pleasures, which the rich obtain with greater ease by their wealth, and in a far greater degree by their prodigality. I am indeed convinced, that many of the advantages ascribed to relative luxury are ideal, many of them trifling, and yet more of them dependent on those external and incidental circumstances, which undergo a continual though a gradual change, and, in the end, leave an open field to the ravages of evils, the virulence of which they may have *occasionally* softened, and the eruption of which they may have long retarded. To advantages thus hollow and treacherous, we may justly apply the words of the Prophet: "In the day we make the plant to grow, and in the evening we make the seed to flourish; but the harvest is an heap in the day of grief, and of desperate sorrow."[†]

It is with states as with individuals. — Among the latter, there are periods, at which the most stubborn and persevering industry languishes into sluggishness; and it is not uncommon to see the same man pass from the extreme of frugality to that of profuseness, and squander in corrupt amusements what he had amassed by honest labour. Thus, in all flourishing states, there is a critical point, where undisturbed tranquillity, *itself* the effect of vigilance and activity, renders men careless and inactive; where opulence can no longer gratify the desires which it has excited by the facility, and inflamed by the frequency of enjoyment; where diligence is enfeebled by the violent and unremitted stretch of the very springs which set it in motion; where they who have toiled to procure the pleasures of other men, are themselves impatient to enjoy those pleasures; where luxury quite *drains* the sources it for a time *supplied*; and where the wealth, that flowing through various channels once diffused general prosperity, is silently drawn within that vortex, in which the avarice of the few is ever ready to collect and absorb what the dissipation of the many has rashly scattered. It is recorded
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^{*} Vid. Hume's Ess. Vol. I. p. 305. — I differ from him.

[†] Isa. xvii, ver. 11.

of the Carthaginians*, that for many years they were neither disturbed by sedition, nor harraſſed by tyranny.—But this ſingular felicity could not ſave them from ruin, when the prevalence of Aſiatic luxury, and the exorbitant wealth of individuals, had introduced corruption into the ſtate. — Many of their inſtitutions, as a diſtinguiſhed writer on the ſcience of legiſlation complains, tended to make opulence more reſpectable in the public eye than virtue. The pernicious conſequences of theſe inſtitutions were, as he obſerves, retarded by good fortune, rather than by good laws : and the juſtneſs of that obſervation was afterwards demonſtrated by the diſtracted counſels and vitiated morals, which preceded the overthrow of that *once* virtuous, and *once* prosperous republic. — After the reduction of Carthage, and the defeat of Antiochus, the felicity of Rome ſeemed to reſt on the firm pillars of opulence and power. — But the ſtate was, in truth, oppreſſed and debilitated by its own enormous weight. Amidſt all the treaſures which unwearied diligence could accumulate, or rapine protected by law could extort ; amidſt the vigour of arms, the luſtre of victory, and the authority of dominion, this ſtupendous fabric decayed, tottered, and fell. “ Thou haſt ſaid in thy heart, I will aſcend into heaven ; I will exalt my throne above the ſtars of God : how art thou fallen from heaven, how art thou caſt down to the earth, which didſt weaken the nations !” †

Perhaps, within the circle of *your own* obſervation, *other* ſtates may be found, where all the pleaſures of Aſia are poured into the lap of Senſuality, and all her wealth is eagerly ſeized by the graſp of Avarice. In thoſe ſtates, it might be invidious to commend the ſagacity and exalted patriotiſm of the Conſul, who, reſuſing to pray for the increaſe of the republic, was content to aſk from heaven the preſervation of that power, which in his opinion, and in reality too, was already great enough.‡ But ſurely every wiſe people will be on their guard againſt the diſtant and poſſible evils of luxury ; nor will they truſt to temporary and precarious expedients for deliverance from thoſe evils, which other nations have ſuffered : they will recollect, that in ſtates, as well as families, proſperity and greatness are *not* convertible terms ; that the opulence which makes a people happy, ſhould be carefully diſtinguiſhed from that which makes them luxurious ; and that wide is the difference between the ſtability of an empire, and that exceſſive ſtretch of dominion, which, like gold in its laſt ſtate of expansion, exchanges ſolid ſtrength for empty and tranſient ſhow.

The different people, whoſe ſufferings I have had occaſion to ſet before you, were indisputably and notoriously ſinners — but would it not be hardy to ſay, they

* Vid. Ariſt. de Repub. lib. xxi. p. 334 & 335. Edit. Du Val.

† Iſa. xiv. ver. 12 and 13.

‡ See Political Diſquiſitions, vol. iii. p. 63.

they were sinners above all other people? And are we not ourselves placed in a situation, where the recollection of our own sins ought to follow the retrospect we have taken of the crimes and the sufferings that are recorded of past ages?

In the description which I mean to hold out to your view, I wish to abstain from churlish and declamatory exaggeration; nor could I, without violence to my own feelings, descend either to the servility of adulation, or the acrimony of factious invective. It is indeed no pleasing task, but it is a most important one, to know the times and seasons; to detect every lurking corruption, which partiality would colour over, or cowardice dissemble; to mark every alarming symptom, which, having baffled the power of palliatives, calls for a more specific and more *unsparing* treatment.

We cannot avail ourselves even of the futile pleas that are urged in vindication of *relative* luxury. When a frivolous and corrupt emulation has levelled all distinctions; when it is become ignominious for a man to confine his expences within the sphere of his station; when custom is supposed to *sanctify* every excess that it has encouraged; when profusion rather than parsimony gives the keenest edge to the rapacity of avarice; when the cravings of artificial appetites are so importunate, as to silence not only the milder remonstrances of discretion, but the peremptory *menaces* of law itself; when the pestilential taint of venality has infected all ranks of men, and all the virtues both of friendship and patriotism are swallowed up in the abyss of selfishness; the luxury of *such* a people may be pronounced *absolute*; and absolute luxury has ever been acknowledged indefensible, and almost incurable.

I know that our manners are polished; that the conveniencies and pleasures of life are most abundant; or, in other words, that all the refinements which our vices have fostered, and our vanity has dignified with the name of Liberal Arts, or Public Blessings, are encouraged among us with a zeal that borders upon extravagance. I also know, that these specious advantages are a very inadequate compensation for the mischiefs that attend them. They always *forebode*, and often *generate*, those evils which terminate in national ruin. They were possessed in their utmost extent by the Romans, when the dearest rights of that people were surrendered up to the insidious encroachments of Augustus. They were possessed by the Athenians, when an extravagant and puerile admiration of those arts which *enervate* the mind, as well as *polish* it, an ostentatious and expensive splendor in their buildings, an immoderate passion for theatrical amusements, a lavish abuse of private and of public wealth, disappointed all the expectations that might have been formed from the wisdom of a Solon, the integrity of a Socrates, and the eloquence of a Demosthenes. By their own vices were those self-conceited, self-deluded, self-devoted wretches betrayed into the hands of their conqueror.

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What is recorded of these states, may be extended to all others that have been equally corrupt; for that any people should exist, whom luxury does not gradually weaken, and ultimately destroy, is a supposition which history contradicts, which experience does not warrant, and which speculation, however it may torture facts, or embellish fiction, will be scarcely able to support. In order therefore to check the triumphs, and to guard against the misrepresentations, of persons who would infer the justness of their own sentiments from any *incorrectness of expression* in those who differ from them, I will now recapitulate what has been offered to your consideration on the subject of luxury; a subject which in speculation is always curious, and which in practice is to *us* most important.

It were, I confess, an abuse of language, to call that people luxurious, among whom the elegant refinements of life, when obtained by diligence and ingenuity, are enjoyed with *prudence* and *moderation*: but when this *ceases* to be the case, diligence and ingenuity become public evils by corrupting the public manners, and therefore ought to be controuled in their operation, or directed to other objects of more *unequivocal* and more *unmixed* utility. Does then the condition of man leave no room for the existence of relative luxury? Unquestionably it does; and the term may be *properly* applied, where it should be also strictly *confined*, to that state of things, in which the evils are *few* and *incidental*, while the good is *solid* and *lasting*. — But, even in *this* state of things, the most flattering state in which luxury can be supposed to prevail, and the *only* state in which it ought to be defended, we have no right to say that every apprehension is irrational, or every restraint superfluous. So exposed are the affairs of men to change, so strong are their propensities from bad to worse, so alluring are the blandishments supplied by luxury, and so importunate are the desires excited by it, that we cannot, without the grossest improbability, suppose any whole people to continue long within those boundaries which reason prescribes to the caprices of appetite, and the dominion of custom. The truth is, that relative luxury has in all nations, sooner or later, *degenerated* into *absolute*. Such is the unavoidable tendency of things, and such have been their uniform operations. Occasions indeed there are, on which the lenitives of art, or the more severe correctives of laws, may be applied with success. — But, unhappily for mankind, *they* who ought to apply them, are seldom superior to the joint temptations of habitual voluptuousness and immediate gain. On the contrary, they are often induced not only to withhold the remedy, but to *cherish the disease*; they treat with derision even the idea of providing for *future safety*, by *present renunciation*; and they affect to consider it as the consummation of *political wisdom* to encourage the vices of those around them, with little hazard of detection from others, and with the certainty of much profit to themselves.

However political utility may be separated from moral rectitude; however the tenets of some men, and the practices of others, may favour the separation; it is not

not the part of a good citizen to slacken the obligations of virtue.—*He* will trace the actions of men from their primary motives to their remotest consequences; he will look upon the criminal application of labour as equally detrimental with a total suspension; he will remove the necessity of having recourse to either of these terrible alternatives, by directing the attention and accommodating the interests of men to better pursuits. Instead of confiding in sumptuary laws, which operate more by prevention than by remedy, and which are seldom *instituted* till the prevalence of wickedness makes it scarcely possible for them to be *observed*, he will lay the foundations of national happiness in such a reformed system of politics and *education*, as will employ the rising generation wisely and *continuously*, without the odium or the inconveniences of a violent and *sudden* check to the wrong employments of the present. These opinions, however prejudice may for a time condemn them, experience will, in the issue, justify. Repugnant they are, indeed, to the base and narrow craftiness which gratifies private ambition and private avarice at the expence of the public manners: but they will be found intirely consistent with that *enlarged wisdom*, which, selecting the best means for the best purposes, intends honestly, pursues steadily, and executes successfully.

So rooted, and as it were instinctive, is the abhorrence of dissolution, so vigorous are the struggles exerted to repel it, even in its last and nearest approach, that from the most alarming proofs of decline in any empire, we cannot always predetermine the period to which its existence may be prolonged.—By the energy of its original constitution, by the use of occasional remedies, or by the concurrence of fortunate circumstances, our own country may for some years mitigate the severity of these evils which are produced by a sickly and enormous corpulency. — But the stoutest and soundest constitution may be destroyed: the most flattering remedies may come too late; and upon contingent circumstances, the *efficacy* and the *existence* of which are equally unknown, no reasonable hope can be grounded. In the body politic, as in the body natural, there is a degree of corruption, which, having reached the first principles of life, no longer yields to the force of expedients injudiciously applied, or rashly neglected. — How far this may be our own case, it well becomes us to enquire; and to me it seems, that the unwillingness of men to engage in the enquiry, is no doubtful indication, no inconsiderable part, of the evil itself.

But you will ask me, Is there no fairer side of things? There is, my brethren; and I will stop to contemplate it, not to amuse you with phantoms of imaginary happiness, but to rouse you from your insensibility to that which is real; not to *gratify* your vanity, but to convince you that your *ingratitude* leaves you *no room* to be vain.

Venerable for its antiquity, and endeared to us by a long experience of its use, the constitution of this country may justly challenge the annals of the world to
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produce an equal. Founded on the solid rock of justice, cemented by duration, and fortified by every expedient that policy could suggest, it has hitherto withstood all the shocks of external violence, and all the dark machinations that have been employed to undermine it. Complaints, I know, have been urged against the multiplicity of our civil, and the rigour of our penal laws;—but when these laws are compared with such as are established in other countries, their principles will be found equitable, their spirit mild, and their administration most impartial. Although the discipline of our armies be excelled in some neighbouring states, where military strength is perverted into an engine of oppression, their valour in every just cause has long excited the admiration even of their enemies; and with regard to that force which forms the peculiar and firmest bulwark of our safety, the skill of our commanders, and the intrepidity of our seamen, are confessedly without example. Narrow indeed will be his views, and languid his satisfaction, who would confine the glory of this country to the wisdom of its laws, and the vigour of its arms.—Polite literature has been cultivated among us with a success that antiquity only has surpassed. The mechanic arts have been improved by us, not perhaps to the highest perfection of exterior elegance, but to the no less honourable purposes of general utility. In this respect they have probably reached their summit; and it might be wished that the wantonness of innovation, and the debaucheries of refinement, should be, in future, controuled. As to the more abstract sciences, so profound have been our investigations, and so important our discoveries, that we are permitted to take the lead, I say not merely of northern Europe, where civilization has scarcely dawned, nor of those southern parts where superstition blasts every effort of genius; but of those brave and accomplished people, who are alone entitled to dispute the palm of superiority with us, either in the achievements of war, or in the arts of peace. But, amidst the advantages that distinguish this country, a very illustrious rank must be assigned to that religion, which is alike exempt from the harshness of Calvinism and the corruptions of Popery; which preserves the sacred privileges of revelation, without infringing the no less sacred rights of reason; which looks, I trust, with some degree of favour, on the worthiest and the ablest of its teachers, who have been eminent as well for their enlarged sentiments of toleration as for their exemplary piety; and which no longer lifts up the terrors of persecution over the manly and rational enquirer, who, without offering any *wanton* insult to *prescription*, asserts and enjoys the liberty of paying a larger share of homage to the *superior* authority of *truth*.

It will not, I hope, be thought paradoxical, if, in recounting the happy effects of our admirable constitution, I should mention the present condition of those numerous and respectable citizens, who are not included within the pale of our ecclesiastical establishment. Their condition, indeed, does the highest honour to our country, and to our age. By the most vigorous efforts of the understanding, they have delivered themselves from the galling bondage of
bigotry

bigotry and superstition, with which their forefathers were unfortunately shackled. They have made many valuable improvements in literature, in science, and in rational theology. They have acquired a degree of political importance, which, so long as it is controuled by the supreme power of the laws, must eventually contribute to the general stability of our freedom, and the general dignity of our Empire. It has, I know, been asserted, that their zeal in the defence of liberty is turbulent, and their ideas of it romantic. I will not enter into the invidious discussion of a charge, which no man who adduces it, means, I trust, to extend beyond individuals: but I should be guilty of the meanest dissimulation, if I did not acknowledge, that the greater part of them have the merit of acting *consistently* with their solemn professions, and noblest interests. Whether it be owing to the steady principles in which they are educated, or to the advantageous circumstances in which they are placed, few of them have hitherto learned to barter away their most important rights, for those splendid but treacherous bribes, the influence of which has been very unfavourable among persons, to whom I stand in a nearer and more sacred relation. Undoubtedly we have reason to thank God, that the illiberal and pernicious distinctions which divided them and ourselves, are gradually wearing away; and, if the misfortunes which our sins have now brought upon us, should, hereafter, be happily removed, the day, perhaps, will at last come, when a system of *perfect equality* shall be thought at once consistent with the public safety, and conducive to the public welfare. The spirit of our benevolent religion requires this auspicious change: the principles of our free constitution warrant it: the tendency of external events seems to favour it: and the exertions of all good and wise men should be employed to accomplish it. At all events, the capacity of a state to admit such a change, is no inconsiderable part of our national glory; and every approach that has been actually made towards it, should be considered as a national advantage.

Thus numerous, and thus conspicuous, have been the blessings of providence towards us.—But can it be said that our returns of thankfulness and obedience bear any proportion to those blessings? Here, alas! a gloomy prospect seems to present itself:—but we must not shrink from the question; for it is suggested to us by the words of my text: it is urged home to our consciences by the solemnity of this day: it is even forced upon our fears, by the interest that ourselves and our posterity have in a just decision. Let us endeavour to obtain a just decision, by a diligent and impartial enquiry.

Before such enquiry can be prosecuted with effect, or even begun with propriety, it is necessary for me to suspend the force of some reigning prejudices, that may render you averse to the sternness of truth, which is often the more unwelcome in proportion as it is more momentous. When a nation is wearied with prosperity, giddy with ideal greatness, and quite insensible to the dignity of
F virtue;

virtue; when it is no longer able to bear either its own vices, or the rigid discipline essential to their reformation; a host of comforters usually start up, who invert the very order of things that God has assigned, who give a sanction to the iniquity that he has forbidden, "who put light for darkness, and darkness for light."* Declarations of this kind are not less weakly supported, than they are zealously propagated; and, perhaps, I am not very uncharitable in saying, that they who make them, are to be found among the most wicked, and they who adopt them, among the most credulous of men. But in a wicked and a credulous world, the retailers of such declarations will be numerous; and it unfortunately happens, that they who are bound by their superior situations in life, or their superior share of abilities, to oppose every delusion, are too often tempted by their own wayward passions, and their own ambitious designs, to *vindicate*, what, in the moment of uttering it, they know to be *false* and *dangerous*. But woe be to that nation "where the seers see not, where the prophets prophesy not right things," and "they who are appointed to rule over men and lead them, cause them to err!"† Though every evil tidings be hushed, and good be proclaimed *continually*, great reason is there to fear that the Lord of hosts is not for a crown of glory to that people, nor for a spirit of judgment to him that sitteth in judgment, nor for strength to them that turn the battle to the gate."‡

I have already pointed out to you the fallacy of some arguments implicitly admitted, because they are confidently alledged, in vindication of luxury. But there is another opinion equally prevalent, and equally mischievous, with that which I have before endeavoured to confute; for we are told, nay we are all of us too ready to tell *ourselves*, that the quantity of vice and virtue is the same at all times. If this opinion be just, all complaints must be as ineffectual as they are groundless, and deserve to be charged on the causes to which they are commonly attributed, on the fullness of misanthropy and the deliriums of enthusiasm. But those complaints, however ridiculed, or however disregarded, are grounded on facts; and that they are so, the very popularity of the objections made to them affords a strong presumption. They who cannot aspire to the honour of positive justification, hope to shelter themselves from infamy, by invidious and unjust comparison. The Pharisee applauded himself because he was *not as* other men were: we acquit ourselves on the supposition that other men *were* what we *are*; and each of us is guilty as well of partiality in the sentence we pass on our own conduct, as of rashness in arraigning the imaginary faults of other men. It may perhaps be said, that they who insist upon the equality of different ages in respect to their moral attainments, do not seriously believe what they obstinately maintain. But let not the extreme improbability, or the flagitious wickedness of any opinion, be thought sufficient to destroy its credit among those whose indolence and whose selfishness induce them to profess, and to disseminate it. The effects of

* Isa. chap. ii. ver. 20.

† Isa. chap. iii. ver. 12.

‡ Isa. chap. xxviii. ver. 5 and 6.

of rational conviction are too often feeble and inadequate. — It is equally true, and equally lamentable, that a partial or pretended conviction produces the most powerful effects; that men are more strenuous to support what they suspect to be *erroneous*, than what they know to be *just*; that, through the fascination of errors familiarised by custom, and endeared by interest, it becomes rashness to controvert, in one age, the very position it was thought folly to advance in another; and that tenets, which shock common sense and common justice, at length acquire all the authority of popular maxims, and all the efficacy of established principles. Self-delusion is ever averse from enquiry, though by enquiry alone can the charm be dissolved. Hence arises the necessity of exposing in the clearest point of view, and in its fullest magnitude, the absurdity of opinions, which he who avows them can seldom persuade himself to examine, but which he may be ashamed not to renounce, after the apposite and cogent proofs employed by other men in their confutation.

These remarks will not, I hope, be thought impertinent. I have made them as a kind of apology for entering minutely into the futility of a plea, which, ridiculous as it is when reduced to a *particular* examination, is yet advanced with all the confidence of *general* assertion, and is admitted too as a satisfactory answer to every charge of increasing depravity.

Let us then see how far the assertion, that the same degree of vice has prevailed at all times, can be applied to mankind universally. They who thus contend for it, are not entitled even to the scanty praise of plausibility, till they can prove themselves able to ascertain the precise number of men that have lived at different periods; to discover not only the *prominent* features of national character, but the more *hidden and complex* motives that actuate individuals; to balance their relative and absolute interests; to penetrate their subordinate, as well as ruling passions; to determine the *exact* degree of civilisation to which they have respectively advanced, and the exact degree of barbarism in which they have been plunged.

Those nations which have arisen to any eminence in the cultivation of knowledge, and the improvements of social life, have been once placed in a less honourable condition. — But, if the paradox now under consideration be well founded, whether these nations were *much* civilised, or *little*, or *not at all*, the quantity of happiness enjoyed, and the quantity of virtue practised, would be *the same*. It follows, therefore, that the artificial advantages of society do not preponderate, when weighed against the artificial evils; that by the restraints of law, the researches of philosophy, and directions of religion, mankind are not, in fact, elevated above the savage state! that the enlightened inhabitants of Europe cannot much boast of their superiority over their own fierce and ignorant forefathers; and that, as to real and intrinsic good, they stand on a level with those tribes who roam over the barren deserts of Africa, or the gloomy forests of America.

America. This state of the case is fair and impartial. If *no* difference subsist between men in the scale of moral excellence, the consequence I have just deduced is inevitable — if *any* difference subsist, the *degrees* of that difference are to be ascertained, not by arbitrary assumption, that they are *very small*, but by an appeal to facts, which may prove them to have been *very great*.

So far as the opinions of these men respect the whole of our earthly system, they are of fatal tendency.—They throw the severest reproaches on the attributes of God, who has invell'd us with seeming powers, which we are, in truth, incapable of exerting, or which we exert to no purpose. They check, and are intended to check, the zeal of virtue, by persuading us, that we *cannot* become *better* than other men; and they give new confidence to guilt, by flattering assurances that we are not become *worse*. They contradict the general appearances of things, which, so far as they have been collected by judicious and unprejudiced comparison, give us reason to hope, that mankind, upon the whole, are in a state of progressive, though it be slow, improvement. In a more extensive point of view, I therefore pronounce those opinions unphilosophical, as well as irreligious; and I shall directly oppose to them one fact, which, to me, appears both pertinent and decisive.—The virtues of the Greeks were lighter in the balance, when they plundered the wealth, and rioted in the pleasures, of the Persians, whom they had conquered. But we do not hear that the equilibrium supposed by this hypothesis, was restored, either among the Greeks, by the introduction of *other* virtues; or, in respect to the *general* sum of moral good, by the reformation of the Persians: and to assume, that it was restored by the reformation, or improvement of any other unknown contemporary people, is to decide without evidence, and to beg the very question in dispute. As to the more limited, and, I believe, the more popular application of the same hypothesis to particular countries, it is fully confuted by such partial knowledge as history has supplied. But in regard to what we do not know, it is presumptuous to deduce positive conclusions from premises which are conjectural, or merely negative; and it is perverse, not to admit, under any restrictions, the proofs that analogy furnishes for a gradation of crimes, in different places, and in different ages.

In the prophetic and historical writings of the Jews, the crimes of that people are painted in the most faithful and glowing colours; but they had not reached the extremity of wickedness, till their rejection of the gospel, their inhuman treatment of its author, and its friends, their gross impositions in commerce, and their tumultuous disobedience to government, brought upon them their last, and their heaviest distresses.—Surely the contests between Sylla and Marius left their countrymen *more* seditious, *more* dissolute, *more* rapacious, than their ancestors had been; and, however we may condemn the refined vices that prevailed in the age of Augustus, we cannot place them on a level with the
horrible

horrible excesses which disgraced the courts of a Nero, a Domitian, or an Helio-gabalus. In our own country, the manners of the people were less licentious in the reign of Elizabeth, than in that of Charles the second; and to compare one acknowledged evil with another, it may be doubted whether the fanaticism and blind zeal, which raged during the grand Rebellion, were more offensive to God, and more injurious to man, than the deluge of profaneness and debauchery that poured in upon us after the Restoration. — Of that inauspicious reign, let it never be forgotten, that the same people who were luxurious at home, were contemptible abroad; that the enemies who had been kept in awe by the ferocity of an Usurper, insulted us, almost, with impunity; and that the constitution was nearly sapped by the intrigues of Popery, the establishment of which must always be facilitated by libertinism, which *consistently* enough prefers a religion of ceremonies to one of morals, and by infidelity, which measures the merit of all religions by their subserviency to the execrable purposes of despotism.

By these arguments you will, I hope, be effectually cautioned against the rash assumptions of those who pronounce the vices of our forefathers uniformly and precisely equal with our own. It is absurd to say that our ancestors were in *all* respects *as* criminal as ourselves; and to say that they were, upon the whole, more criminal, might be unjust and arrogant. Doubtless there is, in every state, a fluctuation of virtues and vices; — yet it by no means follows, that the causes of those fluctuations succeed each other in the same order, or that they operate with the same degree of intenseness. We are still at liberty to deny, that the same vices prevail in the same extent at all times, and that all vices are equally malignant in their nature, and baleful in their effects.

The crimes which *now* prevail in this country, are of a most alarming and portentous kind. To deduce them *solely* from our commerce and our arts, were to confound the abuse of things with their use; to call those causes primary and necessary, which are only secondary and occasional; or rather, to mistake the accidental instrument for the radical principle. To inveigh against the deficiency of our laws, the intrigues of statesmen, and the corruption of courts, were to bring an odium on some distempered parts, when the unsoundness of the whole body calls for correction. — The root of the evil lies deeper — it is to be found in a general want of morals, *producing*, and in its turn, *produced by*, a general want of religion. The more immediate sources of both are said to lie in our national successes, in our exorbitant wealth, and in the luxury resulting from them. But it is not uncommon for effects to re-act with double force upon their causes; and when this happens, all of them conspire to increase the sum of those evils which they, respectively, produce. The accusation which I have produced, you may think *trite* and unappropriate — but I know it to be *just*, and if the faults that have been separately imputed to other ages, should be found almost collectively in our own, shall this pre-eminence in wickedness be permitted to impose silence, or extort approbation?

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It is remarked by a writer, whom no man has ever charged with the weakness of superstition, that Rome was indebted for its prosperity not more to the policy of Romulus, than to the piety of Numa.* But that religion should be considered as unessential, and even injurious to the public welfare, is a discovery reserved for the superior penetration of our own times, in which the morals of the Epicureans are united with the tenets of the Pyrrhonists.

What excuse, I beseech you, can be urged for the indifference of some men, for the real or affected contempt of others, towards the most sacred and most interesting truths? Why are the great principles, on which eternal happiness is suspended, hunted down by wanton raillery, explained away by temporising accommodation, or bewildered in all the labyrinths of sceptical perplexity? Are there wanting among us men of such daring effrontery, as not only to pluck down the pillars of Christianity, but to shake natural religion itself from its basis, and by one desperate effort to crush every consolation of afflicted virtue, and every fear that can restrain the audacity of the wicked? Do not these wretches meet us in open day? And are not we stunned with the clamorous paradoxes of such men as stand forth avowed advocates for the most insidious sophistry, for the most shocking impiety, for “all the rash dexterity of wit,” when levelled, with unsparing and undistinguishing fury, against the majesty of God, and the dearest interests of mankind?

Unless they have arrived at the last stages of wickedness, mankind, however they may neglect the practice, are yet willing to assume the appearance of virtue; and if the turpitude of crimes may be estimated by their consequences, some degree of negative commendation seems due to the decency, which conceals the offences forbidden by religion, and even to the hypocrisy which, by implication, approves what is commanded by it. But it is the characteristic infamy of our own times, that vice should not only be tolerated, but justified; not only practised without compunction, but avowed without shame; not only *caught* by the secret and sudden contagion of example, but *acquired* with all the firmness of deliberation, and all the formality of system. Hence the precious days of our youth are consumed, not in treasuring up stores of knowledge, not in forming habits of morality, but in the attainment of *exterior* accomplishments, or in the pursuit of frivolous amusements, or in determined anxious preparation for *more open* and more hardened wickedness.

Do we not see the purity of Education sullied, her dignity degraded, herself become a willing slave to the tyranny of Fashion, and stooping to accept the wages of Prostitution, from Folly, from Affectation, and from Lust? These, or *such* as these, are the instructions, which almost every parent drops into the ears of almost every child.—“My son, you are destined for a world, where
“appearances

* See Machiavel. b. i. ch. 11.

“ appearances are highly valued, because they are easily perceived ; where real
 “ merit is not less rare, than it is obscure ; where they who *can* discern it, will
 “ depreciate it from envy ; and they who cannot, will despise it from stupidity.
 “ Learn, then, to practise upon the weakness and the ignorance of that world ;
 “ and be assured, that your happiness depends upon the ease with which you
 “ accommodate yourself to the caprices of the fickle, and the prejudices of the
 “ obstinate.—The task is not difficult ; for they who fear detection, are sel-
 “ dom forward to detect ; and the glaring colours of fashion are more than
 “ sufficient to cover the blackness of your designs.—In such a world you must
 “ suspect all professions of disinterested friendship, as a more refined species of
 “ selfishness : you must habituate yourself to look upon public spirit, as
 “ quixotism ; upon religion, as an imposture ; and upon virtue itself, as an
 “ empty name.”

Perhaps, my brethren, you shudder at the bare recital of these admonitions, which resemble, no doubt, rather the malignity of a fiend, than the tenderness of a parent ; and yet, into *these* admonitions may the schemes of education, *yourselves* are pursuing, be *resolved*, when stripped of the *thin disguise* which *conceals* them from your *abhorrence*.

When lessons, which at once soothe the vanity and kindle the passions of youth, are industriously inculcated, they will be eagerly adopted : and can we then wonder that *such* culture in such soils should never fail of success ; that the rising generation should quickly arrive at a maturity of wickedness ; and that the harvest of their crimes should more than repay the barbarous activity of the labourers ?——Rather ought we to be surprised at each *solitary* instance of *virtue* in our posterity, after vice has been recommended to them, at once, by the force of instruction, the authority of experience, and the more powerful allurements of domestic example ?

Instead of looking around for the hideous deformity of sin in other nations, against which we may triumphantly indulge our censures, we shall with greater propriety anticipate, in imagination, the scenes which may hereafter be realised among ourselves. In the contemplation of those scenes, we may surely adopt the language of the Jews, without incurring the disapprobation of Christ ; for in our own children, depraved by our own precepts, we are likely to behold a race of men who will be *indeed* sinful *beyond* all other finners.

By many of us the inestimable gift of freedom has been abused into an instrument of the grossest licentiousness, into a defiance of those laws by which society itself subsists, and a contempt of that subordination by which alone it can subsist *happily*. Others there are, who have endeavoured to subvert the fundamental principles on which our liberties are built, and who for the sake of profit, that
 seldom

seldom aggrandises the hireling, or of distinctions, that make his *infamy* more conspicuous, would bereave us of all the rights, for which our forefathers have expended their treasure and their blood.

They would persuade us, that power, in the very nature of things, must be possessed without limitation, and therefore cannot be opposed without guilt; that liberty is not an inherent *right* of men, but the accidental *concession* of their masters; that every advantage, voluntarily conferred, may be arbitrarily revoked; that the dignity of a prince, in fact, consists in the meanness of his subjects, his strength in their weakness, his wealth in their poverty, his glory in their shame.

Such doctrines Asiatic ignorance, and Asiatic indolence, only, have suffered to be reduced to practice. But such doctrines have been seriously recommended in theory, not only amidst the boasted improvements of European knowledge, but under the jealous vigilance of English freedom.

It is my duty to condemn the *immorality* of these pernicious opinions; and where they who maintain them are laden with rewards, and decked out with honours, I must lament the weakness or the hardness of those who bestow them.

I have spoken with very pointed severity of those who would lull asleep the apprehensions of their fellow citizens, who, for the worst purposes, are always ready to varnish over the worst actions, and who, to gratify the lawless pride of individuals, would undermine the most important rights of the community. But there are men of an *opposite* character, who brood with gloomy satisfaction over the distresses of their country, and paint in the darkest colours the conduct of their governors.

While the contest subsisted only between this Nation and America, the attention of men was engaged in examining the origin of Government, the limits of Freedom, the political restraints of Commerce, the legal conditions of Taxation, and the hitherto *undefined* extent of Parliamentary authority and Colonial rights. When questions thus abstruse and thus complicated were in debate, mutual charity, and even mutual deference, were due among those who could not agree in their general principles, or in the application of them to a particular case. Yet, surely, all difficulties in speculation, or, at least, all opposition in practice, ought to have vanished upon the first appearance of hostilities from an enemy, by whose interposition every man was injured, and by whose success no man could be benefited. It pains me, however, to reflect, that national danger hath not yet produced national unanimity, and that our internal divisions constitute no small part of our misfortunes, and of our crimes. Great allowances are, I confess, to be made for improprieties of expression, and even for some irregularities of behaviour, into which men may be precipitated, under the

the consciousness of upright intentions, and by the impulse of strong sensibilities. But a race of men has lately started up among us, for whom, as Candour can suggest no apology for them, so Indignation itself can scarcely furnish a name. It is the peculiar, and, I hope, the unenvied privilege of these men, to aggravate *every* mistake, to triumph in every disappointment, to arraign, without distinction and without reserve, every measure of their superiors, and to ascribe it either to the most despicable weakness, or the most flagitious wickedness. They consider the exaltation of America as inseparable from the depression of their own country. They look with unconcern upon the insidious designs of those who ever *must* be our enemies, while these designs are supposed to baffle every hope of reunion with those who were *once* our friends. They seem to measure their own wisdom by the *assumed* errors of their governors, and their own importance by the exaggerated sufferings of the governed. Instead of pressing forward, with vigour and alacrity, to the attainment of some good, which may yet be *within our reach*, they rather choose to take an invidious retrospect of that which is *already* lost. Instead of promoting the public welfare by well-timed *concessions*, well-planned counsels, and well-directed efforts, they are too intent upon indulging their resentment against those, whom they *represent* as the *voluntary* authors of all our calamities. Instead of supporting the arm of our national strength, when lifted up against the national Foe, they *eventually*, I DARE not say, *designedly*, open new prospects to his pride, supply fresh virulence to his malice, and give *far* greater efficacy to his devices. That such men should exist in a civilised state, without restraint, or, at least, without infamy, is an additional proof of the sickly complexion which belongs to our times.

I am now treading upon slippery ground, and will therefore explain myself so as to prevent the possibility, not of misrepresentation, indeed, but of mistake. No man can feel a more sincere reverence, a fonder attachment, a warmer zeal, than I do, for the cause of *genuine* and *rational* freedom. I blush not to say, that my indignation has kindled at the ungenerous affronts which have been sometimes offered to that cause, and at the wily sophisms which have been employed to *distinguish away* what the common sense of mankind clearly understands, their common feelings approve, and their common interests require them to watch with jealousy, and to defend with steadiness. But it were a mark of weakness, or of obstinacy, not to *perceive* a *wide* difference between the designs, and even the *claims* of the nations who are now contending: between the efforts of our brethren, who have resisted what they believed to be injurious to them, and the intrigues of our enemies, who have interfered with a manifest intention *to injure*: between the contest we have long supported against the *real*, or *supposed* rights of others, and the exertions we are now making in defence of *our own* honour and safety. It were blindness in the extreme to overlook the forcery of party-prejudice, where the judgments of men are warped by their affections, where the treachery of their hearts hides from them the real source of their own actions, and where the violence of their resentment passes on from *particular persons*, who

are justly or unjustly the objects of it, to every adventitious and external circumstance, every near and remote interest, every private and public measure, with which the remembrance of those objects is *associated*.* At this dangerous juncture, it were the height of wickedness to adopt the harsh suspicions, and to countenance the bitter reproaches of men, who would deprive us of the vigour which even *temporary* unanimity would give to our endeavours, and some of whom (I shudder to mention it!) some of whom would be content to see the community labour under all the dismal effects of repeated miscarriages, that they might enjoy the illiberal and inhuman pleasure of traducing those governors whom they scarcely wish to succeed, lest success should confirm their power, and vindicate their innocence.

Upon topics which the irreconcilable interests, and tumultuous desires of mankind frequently bring into agitation, it is not easy, as, indeed, it is not *necessary*, to strike out any information which may recommend itself as well by *novelty* as by truth. But if men will continue to repeat their misconduct, we must continue to warn them of their danger. If they will persist in throwing out intemperate and undistinguishing invectives against the leaders of the state, we must remind them, that it is a far smoother and more delightful task to censure the faults of others, than to amend our own: that the weakest men may, *after the event*, perceive the mistake, against which the wisest cannot provide: that we are frequently betrayed into rashness and uncharitableness, when we condemn the conduct of men who are surrounded by difficulties, with which our own wisdom has never been embarrassed, and temptations, by which our own virtue has never been assailed: that it is not always safe to argue from a known failure in the execution, to some unknown absurdity in the choice of the means, or of the end: that it is not unusual for men who are accused of deliberately deceiving their country, *to be themselves* involuntarily and innocently deceived: that among their *accusers*, moroseness often sculks under the form of rigorous justice, the rancour of envy is confounded with the ardour of patriotism, and a blind, implacable *hatred of individuals* is mistaken for a pure and generous *love of the public*.

The foregoing observations are very trite, but very interesting. They have been employed, I well know, to hush the suspicions, and to slacken the activity, of

* With these undistinguishing partisans we may contrast the amiable character of Eteclus, as it is drawn by the masterly pen of Euripides. I cannot resist the impulse I feel to place these instructive lines before the Reader; and I recommend them to the serious attention of those who judge of *measures by men*, and are seldom candid in the opinion they form about either.

Τὴς τ' ἐξαμαρτάνουσι, ἔχ' τὴν πόλιν.
Ἡχθαίρ' ἐπεί τοι γ' οὐδὲν αἰτία πόλις,
Κακῶς κλέεσθαι διὰ κτεερῆσιν κακόν.

Suppl. Mus. L. 878.

of men under the most corrupt forms of government. But I also know, that there is frequent and urgent occasion for enforcing them under the most upright administration of the best governments: for, in the best governments, men are often insensible of the blessings which Providence has spread before them, and unjust to the human instruments that are appointed to convey those blessings.

From the treacherous praises of some partizans, and the groundless calumnies of others, in public matters, let us proceed to examine the moral conduct of men in their private characters.

Superficial understandings are easily dazzled by the glare that surrounds exalted stations: but when we follow the great and the powerful into the recesses of their families, do we find them arrayed in those virtues, which shed a less brilliant indeed, but a more equal and a more pleasing lustre over domestic life? In vain shall we there look for that decency of behaviour, that manliness of thinking, and that integrity of principle, to which our ancestors were indebted for their prosperity and their fame. All that commanded respect in them, is meanly sacrificed by their abject children, who are content to receive in exchange the gaudiness of foreign dress, the insipidity of foreign manners, and, what is yet more odious, the rankness of foreign infidelity.

But the depravity of our own age is equally marked by the *meanness*, as by the excess of our vices. No longer do our bosoms glow with that ambition, which, seduced by the brilliancy and the magnitude of its object, too often spurns the restraints of justice, and of law. Instead of this passion, which carried with it an air of wild grandeur, we are distinguished by a loathsome mixture of vanity, covetousness, and venality; by a readiness to corrupt without delicacy, and to be corrupted without shame; by an impatience to glitter in those honours, which, after they have ceased to be *revered* by the unthinking herd, yet continue to be the objects of *envy* among their *more* unthinking superiors. True it is, that we are exempted from all the inconveniences of that ferocious spirit, which, however it may exalt the mind to independence, and brace it with vigour in the hour of danger, is too apt to disturb the repose of private life: but we have little reason to boast of the exchange, when the effeminacy, the false delicacy, and profligacy of the times are thrown into the opposite scale.

There is a dreadful period in the progress of luxury, where the improbability of attaining a better situation betrays men into such actions as hasten the arrival of the worst. Every reflection on the growing insufficiency of the laws to controul the encroachments of power, upon the diminished security of property, and upon the languishing state of the arts by which it is acquired, is at first attended with sullen despondence, or frantic desperation. The transition then becomes short and rapid from unsuccessful industry to incorrigible supineness—
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from factious resistance to abject submission—from querulousness under supposed wrongs, to apathy under those which are real. The prospect of approaching poverty, which once alarmed the mind, now serves only to stupify it, and, instead of teaching discretion, tends rather to produce extravagance. Eager to snatch the few remaining moments of gratification, we no longer think it criminal to abuse, what it may soon be impossible for us to use rightly; and we squander upon the most fantastic wishes of the imagination, and the most corrupt desires of the heart, what may suddenly be wrested from us, and what, in the seeming course of human affairs, cannot be long enjoyed. In the general distress, which all are compelled to lament, and which none have the fortitude to alleviate, domestic virtues die away. The sweet cares of providing for posterity are quickly extinguished, where the provision itself is likely to be inconsiderable and precarious. The baleful effects of prevailing manners are secretly ascribed to some unknown fatality, from which flight is impossible, and to which opposition is vain. Under this delusion we shift off the imputation of personal guilt, upon I know not what external necessity. We rush too precipitately upon all the miseries which we discovered too late; and abandon ourselves, without reluctance, and without remorse, to the most wanton dissipation, or the most riotous debauchery.

These observations naturally suggest themselves to the impartial observer of those disastrous circumstances, which attend the downfall of luxurious kingdoms. They deserve, too, some share of attention from every man who is disposed to examine the tendency of our own reigning vices, with philosophical exactness, and with religious seriousness.

In the higher stations of life, we see rank without dignity, money without wealth, and voluptuousness almost without enjoyment. Our indignation, indeed, is somewhat stayed in its course, by the virtues which yet keep their ground among the middle orders of men; though a serious observer can scarcely survey even *them*, without *secret* apprehensions, that many of the fences are broken down, and that these last retreats of religion will soon be over-run by the devastations of increasing licentiousness.

Much stress has been laid upon the zeal and munificence of our charitable institutions. To dispute the justice of the praises, so peremptorily demanded, and so lavishly bestowed, in favour of these institutions; to depreciate almost the only virtue which fashion has patronised; to examine how far ostentation may co-operate with generosity in relieving the distressed, and in comforting the afflicted; were both illiberal and impolitic: but, surely the confidence of self-approbation ought to be, in *some* degree, repressed by the mischiefs that have arisen from the injudicious or *indiscriminate* use of *well meant* contribution; by the decay of hospitality in the families of the opulent, where *lazy dependents* are pampered

pampered by those superfluities, by which the *hungry orphan* ought to be fed; and, above all, by the scanty streams that issue from private liberality, in situations, to which the regular and limited course of public charities cannot be extended.

As we descend to the lower ranks of men, we see a spirit of prodigality, which the conduct of their superiors *promotes*, and, therefore, in some degree, *extenuates*; a spirit of rancour and envy, which repeated kindness cannot soften; a spirit of indolence, from which the sluggard is hardly awakened by the stimulations of extreme penury; a spirit of discontent and faction, which has already trampled down the distinctions of station and fortune, and which threatens the very existence of society with general dissolution. To these evils in the people, must be added the corruption of too many among those to whom the sacred power of government is, in its *various* branches, entrusted; the seditious turbulence of some, the shameless venality of others, the *affected moderation* and *timid neutrality* of many, the *artificial insensibility* and *voluntary blindness* of more.

When the public worship of God is openly neglected, his word ridiculed, and his Providence indirectly denied: when adultery more than *escapes* from an abhorrence, for it engages some share even of our *esteem*, under the imposing title of gallantry: when profaneness is censured for ill-breeding, only to shelter it the more effectually from every morose charge of immorality: when the fortunes and honours of the most illustrious families, are suspended on the precarious throw of a die: when suicide is become a reputable, and almost a necessary refuge to disappointed avarice: when ideal honour usurps the place of Justice; and the severity of the Laws is blunted by the number and rank of the offenders—when *these* melancholy indications of depravity surround us on every side, “by whom shall I comfort you?” In such a situation, to say that all is well, were weak and perfidious.—It is folly to think that our efforts can counteract the designs of Providence: it is equal folly to imagine, that, in order to *gratify a vicious people*, the Deity will alter that order of things, which his wisdom has instituted for the *discouragement of vice* itself: and it is the excess of infatuation, to suppose that luxury will not exhaust our strength; that dissipation will not debase our spirit; that the flagrant and premature debaucheries of the young, the incorrigible and almost unnatural corruptions of the old, will not ultimately bring down upon us the most fearful judgments of an offended God.

Far be that day of sorrow from our Zion! Yes, my Brethren, every good man will, in the sincerity of his heart, join you in your wishes, that it may be *very* far removed; and he will further wish, that each of you may, in this your day, know and pursue the things that belong to your peace. But the condition in which you are involved, leaves no room for us to trifle or dissemble with you:—it has already confuted all the *smooth* things which interested Ambition

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most sollicitously, and, I blush to say it, most successfully, prophesied in the ear of credulous Ignorance: it has surpassed the expectations of sober, unprejudiced reason, and has *almost* rescued every menace of unprincipled and malicious faction, from the charge of *exaggeration*.

War, though it may be undertaken, according to popular opinions, and popular language, with justice, and prosecuted with success, is a most awful calamity: it generally finds men sinners, or makes them such; for, so great is usually the disproportion between the provocation and the punishment, between the evil inflicted, or suffered, and the good obtained, or even proposed, that a serious man cannot reconcile the very frequent rise, and the very long continuance of hostilities, to reason, or to humanity.—Upon whom, too, do the severities of war fall most heavily?—In many cases, they by whom contention is begun, or cherished, feel their influence extended, their dependants multiplied, and their wealth, in the regular and fair course of public business, increased.—While fields are laid waste, and cities depopulated, the persons, by whose commands such miseries take place, are often wantoning in luxurious excess, or slumbering in a state of unfeeling and lazy repose.—The peaceful citizen is, in the mean time, crushed under the weight of exactions, to which, for “conscience sake,” he submits; the industrious merchant is impoverished by unforeseen and undeserved losses; and the artless husbandman is dragged away from those who are nearest and dearest to him, in order to shed the blood of beings as innocent and as wretched as himself, to repel injuries which he never felt or suspected, and to procure advantages which he may never understand or enjoy.—Such are the aggravating circumstances belonging to war, when it is carried on against a foreign enemy, and though it be disarmed of many terrors which accompanied it in less enlightened and less civilised ages.

But our situation is attended with yet heavier distresses.—We are engaged in a contest, where the most sacred ties are torn asunder, the fondest affections alienated, the most useful attachments disregarded; where every warrior points his sword against the bosom of a fellow citizen, and every conqueror may stain it with the blood of a friend.

These evils, which to common observers once appeared but as the small distant cloud, have gathered around us from every quarter, and burst with all the fury of a tempest, terrible because unexpected. In the past we behold desolation most rapid, most extensive; perhaps irremediable to those who have suffered the blow; and, what is more strange, nearly unprofitable to those who have inflicted it. The present is yet big with difficulty and danger; and over the future is cast one dark, impenetrable veil of uncertainty and horror.

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Let not these assertions be hastily ascribed to the dreams of melancholy, or to the ravings of discontent. You will not think them ill-timed, or ill-founded, if you consider the numerous and increasing evils which surround us.

America has opened a most spacious and unexplored field for experimental policy ; and it may not be within the compass of our penetration to discover, or of our courage to counteract, those projects, which the fierce resentment of our Colonists, united with the profound cunning of our Enemies, may hereafter accomplish. I mean not to entangle you in political discussions of the motives which have impelled our Brethren to connect themselves with a most inveterate and insidious Foe. Whether you applaud that connexion as prudential, or rail at it as unnatural, whether you consider it as imposed by necessity, or suggested by perfidy, the fact itself is indisputable, and the effects of it upon our interests are sorely felt. It has certainly barred up many avenues to reconciliation ; it has enlarged the circle, and multiplied the miseries of war ; it has produced among us such an accumulation of calamities, as it is more easy for the impartial patriot to lament, than for the most sage politician to encounter.

That ambitious House, which once aspired to the sovereignty of Europe upon the Continent, hath suddenly changed its object, without relaxing its activity, and is endeavouring to subdue us on that element, where, by our situation and our valour, we have hitherto maintained an unrivalled superiority. A people, that were often protected by our arms, and enriched by our wealth, are now employing their own arms, and their own wealth, to hasten our downfall. Impatient to share the treasures which America is supposed to contain within its bosom, they have courted the friendship of those very nations by whom their own provinces have been often plundered, their best citizens put to the sword, and the foundations of their free constitution violently shaken. Under the pretence of avenging wrongs which they deliberately provoked, they have found a favourable moment for throwing aside the mask, exchanging evasion for defiance, and seizing by force those advantages, which they had not the audacity to claim on any acknowledged principles of equity.

When such formidable Powers have combined for our destruction, we might expect some neighbouring nations, either from compassion to ourselves, or from jealousy of our adversaries, to step forward for our protection. We might expect some efforts to be made for preserving, or, rather, for restoring that balance of power, which, although it was not totally unknown to the Ancients, has been better understood by the Moderns, and which has long been considered as the most secure defence against the encroachments of the crafty, and the depredations of the powerful. But such expectations, however reasonable in themselves, have hitherto been vain. Some nations have, I fear, smarted under our
insolence—

insolence—others have dreaded our power—more have envied our prosperity—and *all* seem prepared to remain the triumphant, or, at least, the inactive spectators of our aggravated, and almost unexampled misfortunes.—Thus separated from one great and flourishing part of our Empire, abandoned by our former allies, harrassed by our implacable adversaries, we feel not only our strength impaired, and our importance in the political scale diminished, but our very existence,* as a free and independent people, most alarmingly endangered.

True it is, that we have nothing to apprehend from some calamities, by which nations, though trained to arms, and though civilised by arts, have, in former ages, been fatally and finally overthrown. We need not be alarmed about the sudden and impetuous incursions of those roving tribes, which are more to be dreaded from their savage insolence in victory, than their brutal fierceness in battle, and which, with astonishing rapidity, have been sometimes able to defeat disciplined armies, to desolate cultivated countries, and to subvert established forms of government. But have we nothing to fear from other quarters? Are we threatened with no dangers from the malignant jealousy of our rivals, from the insatiable ambition of our enemies, or from the cruel policy of those, whom Providence in its just displeasure may, one day, permit to be our masters? Grant, however, that these distresses are, for the present, averted by the seasonable interposition of other states, and the vigorous exertions of our own. Can any serious man look with unconcern upon our intestine divisions, upon our vitiated manners, upon the enormous magnitude of our debt, upon the galling pressure of our taxes, upon the progressive spirit of emigration, or upon the silent decay of population? If we rest in thoughtless security, because the last and greatest of evils are not yet arrived, the last and greatest of evils will, like a thief in the night, overtake us, after we have neglected every expedient that may check the intermediate stages of ruin. To check them, however, is, I trust, yet in our power, if all our attention, and all our resolution, be summoned to the task. But God forbid that *such* a task—so delicate in its nature, so difficult in its execution, so interesting in its consequences, should be undertaken by feeble, by unskilful, or by perfidious hands! Never can it be properly intrusted to each specious patriot, or each hardy adventurer; to the narrow selfishness of a party, or the irregular passions of a rabble. It will never be honourably accomplished, but by those wise and upright men, whom the Deity sometimes vouchsafes to raise up, for the support of a sinking people; by those who have learned to distinguish between the plausible in theory, and the useful in practice; by those who disdain to profess what they do not mean,

* *Nunc verò non (solum) id agitur, bonisne, an malis moribus vivamus; neque, quantum, aut quàm magnificum imperium populi ANGLICANI sit: sed, HÆC cujuscumque modi videntur, nostra, an, nobiscum unà, hostium futura sint.*—See the speech of Porcius Cato, in Sallust.

mean, and to undertake what they do not understand : by those who can be temperate, without languor, and active, without violence : by those who are prepared to improve what is excellent, without visionary refinement, and to correct what is hurtful, without daring innovation. The race of these Worthies is not, I hope, utterly extinct. Some marks of this exalted character are to be found among the advocates and the opponents of our present measures; and may their wishes never be fettered by partial convenience, or temporary connections! May they happily find, or, rather, may they generously unite in creating, opportunities for the glorious display of all their talents, and of all their virtues!

When a Nation is placed in the disastrous circumstances that I have represented to you, it were unfeeling *only* to *acknowledge* the fact; and to account for it on political principles, to the *utter exclusion* of moral, were glaringly absurd. Indeed, every man whom system has not deluded, or pride hardened, will carry his views much *farther*. He will look for the most efficacious, though not for the *grosser* and more *obvious* causes of our present distractions, both in his own vices, and those of other men; and in their effects, he will discern, not merely the intricate windings of human cunning, or the irregular fallies of human passion, but the awful correction of that Being, whose power controuls the madness of the people, and whose anger is kindled not a little, when they are let loose to destroy.

If the Jews, over whom the rod of justice was yet suspended, be inexcusable in condemning the Galileans; what apology can be framed for us, who are overtaken, at least, by the "beginning of sorrows?" Probably, among ourselves, as among the Jews, experience of past favours has produced *tumultuous and confident* expectations of future succour.

Be it so—the Jews were delivered from the hosts of Assyria: they were brought back from their captivity in Babylon: but of their final dispersion, the most dreadful traces remain to this day. Though repentance had repeatedly averted the judgments that were threatened against this people, and repeatedly mitigated those which were inflicted on them, they have at last drunken the cup of fury, in its *unmixed* bitterness, and wrung out the very *dregs* of vengeance.

From the delusions of fanaticism, and the miseries of anarchy, which followed after the grand Rebellion, *this* Country was happily delivered. In a subsequent reign* it was rescued from the oppressions of Despotism, leagued with Popery; and our escape was then effected with such ease, and such rapidity, that men were almost surprised into the possession of all the blessings which they had

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viewed

• James II.

viewed only in the horizon of distant futurity, and towards which they were preparing to go forward, through toils and perils, through the animosities of party, and the horrors of war.

With the confidence of the Jews, you may boast of these interpositions. You have also abused them with the ingratitude of the Jews, in the hour of insolent prosperity; and the period may have arrived to you, as it certainly *has* arrived among the Jews, when it will be no longer in your power to make a wrong use of protection, because it is no longer bestowed.

To an understanding that brings into one point of view all the complicated operations of those natural and moral, those political and religious causes which are now unfolding themselves: to a mind that can steadily weigh the strength of the contending parties, not in their *immediate exertions*, but in their *future resources*; our present calamities may seem not less to require the aid of heaven, than those from which we have hitherto been delivered. For my part, I do not presume to anticipate the designs of the Almighty towards us, to scrutinise the measures he may employ in bringing to pass his "*strange act*," or to extend my conjectures through that chain of events, of which, perhaps, scarcely the *first* link is experimentally known. But sure I am, that, however *unlimited* be our ingratitude, the mercies of God are not bound to keep pace with it; and that the interpositions of Omnipotence will not *for ever* wait upon the call of a disobedient people. At all events, we cannot have a more efficacious plea for imploring the protection of God, than our conformity to his righteous laws; nor can we pursue a surer path, of escaping the Jewish *punishments*, denounced in my text, than by shunning the Jewish *crimes* of pride and uncharitableness condemned in it.

In the course of this address, I have endeavoured to fix upon your minds, the *best* impressions that *can* be made by the present solemnity; I mean, a deep and contrite sense of your numberless offences; a fearful expectation of the judgments that may await you; a sincere and steady resolution of speedy amendment. But, if any man be so prejudiced, as to disbelieve the reality of our national corruptions, and yet so presumptuous, as to join in a service where those corruptions are repeatedly acknowledged, let him hear, not from *me*, but from the mouth of an *inspired Prophet*, how far a sensual and self-sufficient habit of thinking can agree with the religious institution of this day. * "In this day has the Lord God called to weeping, and to mourning, and to sackcloth: but behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine; let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." Such inconsistent and impious sentiments our legislature has virtually disclaimed, in those serious terms by which
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* Isaiah, chap. xxii. ver. 12 and 13.

every member of the community is called upon to humble himself before the Lord ; and every *worthy* member of the community equally disclaims them by his *obedience* to that call. But, if any one of my hearers should entertain different sentiments : if he rush into the sanctuary, not with the spirit of humility and repentance, which our church recommends, but in the spirit of strife and debate, which the Prophet has condemned : if he expect to hear from me inflammatory invectives against the vices of our enemies, or elaborate encomiums on our own virtues : it is my wish to disappoint that man, as it is my *duty* to undeceive and to reform him. Let him, then, recollect, that the Almighty does not launch the thunderbolts of his vengeance, at the bidding of every short-sighted and presumptuous creature : that, amidst the discordant interests, the headstrong passions, and disproportioned powers of mankind, success is not invariably the criterion of justice ; and that even in *mercy* to those who repent before they utterly perish, God often finds the instruments of their correction in *other* obdurate and impenitent sinners, whose very conquests are intended to accomplish their ruin, and upon whom, in the full career of their glory, the vials of divine wrath are poured down from above.—Let him know that zeal, even in the *best* cause, is despicable, when it proceeds from ignorance, and hateful, when it is the effect of pride : that imaginary loyalty cannot expiate inhumanity ; and that the efficacy of piety is not always to be measured by the clamorous importunity of supplication.—To all such hearers, if such there be, I address myself in the animated language of the Prophet, * “ forasmuch as this people draw near to God with their mouth, and with their lips do honour him, and their fear towards God is taught by the precept of men ; *therefore*, † when you spread forth your hands, he will hide his eyes from you ; when you make any prayers, he will not hear : your hands are full of blood.” But in the bosom of the sincere worshipper, there will be no room for the haughtiness of self-admiration, or the acrimony of revenge. On the contrary, he will acknowledge the tendency which the virtues of individuals must have to promote the happiness of the community : he will consider the character of a good Christian as inseparable from that of a good citizen ; and, not content with deploring the calamities, which *his own* misconduct has in some measure occasioned, he will endeavour to alleviate them by immediate reformation. With an understanding which sophistry cannot mislead, and with passions which reproach cannot irritate, he will explore the true sources of all those events which perplex the prejudiced, deceive the precipitate, and terrify the ignorant : he will perceive, that government is the medium through which the Deity conveys *punishment* to the wicked, as well as *reward* to the righteous : that in the commotions of states, there is room for *condemnation* as well as *pity* : that the misconduct of governors derives its *origin* frequently, its *efficacy* always, from the antecedent and general depravity of the governed :

* Isaiah, chap. xxix, ver. 13. † Isaiah, chap. i. ver. 15.

governed: that slavery is seldom established among those who *deserve* freedom, and *never* escaped by those who have *abused* it: that between the misfortunes and demerits of a people, there subsists not only the most intimate connection, but the most exact proportion: that their distresses arise from repentance *long delayed*, and their ruin from impenitence *absolutely incorrigible*.

Under this conviction, he will transfer his complaints from appearances to realities: from contingent and temporary evils, to such as are essential and permanent: from the intrigues of ambition, and the outrages of party, to that indisputable and nearly universal corruption, of which they form only a *part*.—Hence, in all the revolutions of human affairs, he will discover the appointments of a divine Providence. The success of aspiring statesmen, he will acknowledge to be ordained for the chastisement of wicked states—amidst the agonies of an exhausted and expiring constitution, amidst intestine divisions and outward dangers, amidst all the fallacious reasonings, all the impotent remonstrances, and all the fruitless expedients of miserable and worthless men, he will find new motives rising upon *himself*, for admiration of that wisdom, which may be partially traced, and acquiescence in that justice which ought to be humbly adored. As to our adversaries, he will leave the measure, both of their guilt and of their correction, to be determined by the Deity, whose designs are neither retarded by our perverseness, nor accelerated by our impatience. He will beware of uncharitableness in pronouncing them “the *worst* of sinners because they have suffered such things” from the formidable resentment of those with whom they are contending.—He will renounce every groundless claim of perfection; and, awakened from all the delusive dreams of fixed and unalterable security, he will tremble at that warning voice, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

The events of which I have been speaking in this discourse, will be seen in different points of view, according to our different habits of thinking. Thus the Religionist will, with reverential awe, trace them up to the dispensations of that Providence by which vice is punished, and virtue sometimes permitted to share in the punishment. The Philosopher will discern in them the operation of those moral causes which are intimately connected with physical, and which, together with them, make up the whole of our sufferings and our enjoyments. The Politician will discover in them those springs of action, the consequences of which, however diversified by accidental circumstances, may be resolved into the same common principles, whether we survey the wildness of the human character in a state of barbarism, or its regularity under the directions of government. These various forms of speculation have their peculiar rules, and their peculiar uses. But the objects of those speculations are, both in their causes and their effects, closely interwoven. To understand them, also, falls within the compass of enquiries, distinct indeed, but not incompatible: for,
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if a just attention be paid to the particular properties of each cause, and each effect: if an impartial estimate be made of their collective efficacy: if their connections and mutual dependencies be accurately examined, the Religionist, the Philosopher, and the Politician, may rise superior to contracted prejudices, may subdue the obstinate pride which favourite and exclusive systems are too apt to inspire, and may render the most solid and signal services to their Country. They will immediately enlarge the sum of such virtue, and such felicity, as are allotted to man in his present state of imperfection.—At the same time, they will eventually qualify their species for those new stages of existence, new spheres of actions, and new modes of happiness, to which it is the gracious intention of our Maker to conduct his creatures through an unexplored and endless futurity.

To conclude—in respect to the disputes that unhappily subsist between this Country and its Colonies, every feeling heart must bleed at the bare recollection of them, and of their consequences. But to bring them forward for the purpose of minute discussion in the pulpit, were invidious in itself, foreign to the more important ends of our present meeting, and indecent even to profanation, in this temple, sanctified as it is by his presence, who is the God of Peace.

Far, very far, does the turbulence of political debate stand removed from the calmness of religious investigation: and when a Clergyman, whether seduced by real or pretended zeal, strikes aside from the beaten path of moral instruction, and bewilders his hearers in the dark and crooked mazes of party, he seems to forget the simplicity of the Gospel, and the meekness of its blessed Author. Most honourable it is to our holy religion, and most comfortable to those who would teach it in sincerity, and obey it with confidence, that the precepts of Christ will enable men to be virtuous under the *worst* form of government, while they tend to *produce* and to *perpetuate* all the advantages of the *best*. For this reason, our advice, like that of the Apostle, should be earnest, but general; and it should be expressed, not in the captious terms of human wisdom, but in the purity and plainness of *scriptural language*, applied only on *scriptural principles*. We bid you “pay tribute where tribute is due.” But Christianity furnishes no clue to conduct us through the real or artificial difficulties, in which the controversies of men are usually involved. It gives us no commission to weigh the jarring claims of nations in the “balance of the sanctuary.” We exhort you to “honour the King,” and every other Magistrate, as “the servants of God, appointed for your good.” But we say not, for we have no warrant from the Gospel to say, that the abused authority of a righteous Master extends an unlimited and unconditional protection to his unrighteous Stewards; and we leave it, as Christ actually has left it, to the consciences of well-disposed and well-informed Christians, to determine, when the Magistrate deviates from the duties of his venerable character, and forfeits those privileges, which are, upon
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the soundest and most enlarged principles of policy, annexed to it. Be it, therefore, the employment of other men, to trace out the political causes of our present divisions. Ours be the humbler, but not less useful task, of lamenting them, and of alleviating their effects; and well, my Brethren, does that man deserve of his country, who studies to promote its happiness, by his counsel, by his prayers, by his exemplary innocence in private life, and his uncorrupted integrity in public.

To re-echo the clamours, or to gratify the prejudices, of any among the numerous parties that now prevail among us, were an unpardonable prostitution of our sacred office:—but there are measures in which the labours of all parties ought to unite; and there is, also, a language of soberness and truth, by which we may becomingly recommend those measures to your approbation and your practice.

From whatever origin our dissensions and our distresses may have arisen, it should be the earnest desire, the fixed resolution, the unremitting endeavour of every man to bring them to a conclusion. While, therefore, the final event of war is hung up in awful uncertainty, I entreat you, my Brethren, to soften the harshness of mutual suspicions, to quell the fierceness of mutual resentment, and studiously to abstain from that contemptuous scurrility, which is more likely to exasperate than to intimidate. I exhort you to form your own opinions with impartiality, to support them with moderation, and to oppose with good manners and good nature, the sentiments of other men, who, with equal abilities to discern truth, and equal honesty to embrace it, are compelled to differ from you. If the contest should happily terminate, according to the purport of the petitions you have this day offered up to the throne of the Almighty, *then*, as a friend to the real interests of my country, as an advocate for the unalienable rights of mankind, as a minister of that Gospel, the foundation of which was benevolence on the part of God, and the end of which is universal charity among men, I call you up to the discharge of nobler and more arduous duties. Appeal to the voice of Reason, and it will tell you, that your lenity only can conciliate the affection of those, whom your arms may have subdued. Consult the oracles of Religion, and you will be informed, that however the Colonists may be now divided from you, however they may have violated your laws, abused your protection, and insulted your authority, they are yet Fellow-creatures, whom you ought to pity, Fellow-citizens, whom you will be bound to support, Fellow-Christians, whom, under the penalty of final condemnation, you are commanded to FORGIVE.

F I N I S.

